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Wheel of Fortune Spins Chicago

Thousands braved bitter weather for “Wheel of Fortune’s” taping in Chicago during the weekend of March 8 at Navy Pier. Three hours before the show was even to begin, hundreds filed down the halls of Navy Pier toward Festival Hall, where the show had temporarily settled in Chicago. “Wheel of Fortune” taped three weeks’ worth of episodes that will air in late April.

The episodes took place with three different themes: Family Style Week, College Week and “Get in the Game” Sports Week. New things always draw a huge turnout, according to “Wheel” producer Steve Schwartz. Wheel always tried to tour in places that are unique, he added. As “Wheel of Fortune” always tours for three weeks, Chicago is a great place to keep coming up with fresh views.

Hosts Pat Sajak and Vanna White don’t have much time outside of taping episodes when on tour. “I’ve pretty much been on set and in my hotel room the entire time,” said White. However, the workday isn’t bad. A 30-minute show is taped in exactly 30 minutes. Generally, preparation starts at noon and the crew wraps up at 6pm.

Pat Sajak, who is from the Chicago area, said it was nice to tape at Navy Pier, as he doesn’t often get to come downtown when he visits his family throughout the year. The hosts also had the opportunity to meet many locals, since most of the contestants were from the area. Sajak informed us that, several months in advance, contest coordinators hold tryouts to get as many local contestants as possible. But White said that the contestants really haven’t changed much over the 25 years the show has been on the air. Some things just never change.

The set was definitely designed with Chicago in mind, with faux models of Chicago’s skyline rising above the stage area. The audience certainly appreciated the local contestants. Every move, every spin, every successful solving of a puzzle let out “ooo’s” and “ahh’s” from the packed seats. Everyone took full advantage of the cameras turning upon fresh audience faces. Cheering and applause were frequent sounds inside the hall.

But everyone agreed that traveling around the country was a great way to see new things. White said seeing the country from a new perspective was her favorite part. For example, she described her exciting adventure of being on top of the Space Needle in Seattle. Producer Steve Schwartz expressed that getting to see all of “Wheel’s” fans is

great. He explained that the normal audience in Los Angeles is fairly small, but it was fun to tour because of how many fans turn out.

For those thousands of fans who were unable to secure a spot, “Wheel of Fortune” still tours two to three times a season, according to Schwartz, so there is plenty of opportunity for it to come back in the near future, and hopefully more tickets to see the wheel up close.